

IOWA OUTDOORS

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

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July 17, 2007

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Popular State Park Attraction Reopens For Weekends, Holidays

DES MOINES – A popular Maquoketa Caves State Park attraction, closed the past two weeks due to extensive flooding, will now be open weekends and holidays, state park officials announced today.

Dance Hall Cave, the signature attraction at the park, has been closed since early July when an estimated 300 tons of silt, corn stalks, rocks and other debris washed into the cave during a six inch rainfall on July 3. A creek running through Dance Hall Cave delivered the sediment and debris.

Overhead lights located in the cave since 1939 were damaged by the flood and are not operational. It is unknown when the lighting system will be functional. Therefore, cave visitors are encouraged to bring a flashlight, or purchase one at the park's visitor center.

State officials initially closed the cave indefinitely, but trail crew workers have cleared enough debris to allow access to the cave when clean-up efforts are suspended. The cave will be reopened permanently once clean-up efforts are completed, which is expected to take several more weeks.

The remainder of the park, including the campground, other caves and trails, is open to the public during normal park hours.

Dance Hall Cave faced a similar situation after flood occurred around 1980. The cleanup was done by inmates from the nearby state prison and took several months to complete.

For current status on clean-up efforts, call the park office at 563-652-5833. Maquoketa Caves State Park is about six miles northwest of Maquoketa, in Jackson County.

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Friends Group Secures Funding For Beach Complex, Lodge At Lake Darling; Groundbreaking Set For July 26

BRIGHTON – The Friends of Lake Darling raised nearly \$900,000 over the last year to add a beach complex to the state park, which will include building the first lodge in a state park in more than 50 years.

A groundbreaking ceremony to kickoff the project is scheduled for 10 a.m., July 26 at the beach parking lot where the lodge will sit. The event is open to the public.

The beach complex will offer a four-season lodge with indoor seating for 200, plus a covered outdoor patio that can seat an additional 50. A playground, beach shelter and a beach restroom close to the water will also be constructed with these funds. All facilities in the complex will be connected with an ADA sidewalk.

The Friends of Lake Darling raised the money through a grant, donations from local communities, individual private donations, volunteer labor, special fundraising events, and a state appropriation. The DNR added \$100,000.

Lake Darling State Park was dedicated in 1950.

For more information, contact Merrill Lucas, manager at Lake Darling State Park at 319-653-8757, or Jeff Hildebrand, ranger at Lake Darling State Park, at 319-461-0044.

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Restoration Project Enhancing Wildlife, Nongame Habitat At Hendrickson Marsh

RHODES — A restoration project designed to provide better wildlife habitat is underway at Hendrickson Marsh, west of Rhodes in Marshall County.

“We have a wealth of research over the past few years indicating that many of our wetland areas are no longer performing as they should be and are not providing adequate habitat for many of our waterfowl and songbird populations,” said Rick Trine, a DNR wildlife biologist.

The primary concern is lack of adequate vegetation for wildlife, particularly for waterfowl and songbirds dependant on the vegetation for food and nesting habitat. As

undesirable fish species such as carp and buffalo become overpopulated, the vegetation cannot grow because of the constant stirring of bottom sediment by the fish.

“The weather simply didn’t cooperate with us as much as we would have liked this year,” said Trine, explaining that the DNR had attempted to lower the water level during the winter months so that the undesirable fish would freeze under the ice.

“Unfortunately, we just didn’t get enough ice for that to happen this past winter and now we are seeing these fish dying off during the spring and summer months,” said Trine.

Several pickup loads of large dead carp and buffalo have already been collected and removed from the marsh throughout the spring as water levels have been lowered to promote vegetation growth as well as make structural repairs.

Fish that remained in the last deep pool of the 264-acre marsh as the water level was being lowered are just now starting to die off. Many of the fish previously removed were very large ranging from 28 to more than 40 pounds. Smaller fish are now starting to die as the weather heats up and dissolved oxygen in the water becomes less available.

The DNR will be collecting dead fish on the marsh Wednesday, using special boating equipment that allows maneuvering through the mud on the bottom of the marsh to reach the last remaining pool in the middle still holding fish.

“We’ve already removed literally thousands of fish starting last spring,” said Trine.

Efforts to better control rough fish populations and re-populate shallow marsh areas with vegetation are taking place throughout the state to improve habitat and water quality.

“It is still our goal to accomplish as much of the rough fish removal as possible by lowering water levels after the waterfowl season so that the undesirable fish die and decompose underneath the ice,” said Trine.

For more information, contact Rick Trine at 641-752-5521.

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